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"Going Down" to Bethel: Elijah and Elisha in the Theological Geography of the Deuteronomistic History

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The statement in 2 Kgs 2:2 that Elijah and Elisha "went down" (וירדו, *wayyērĕdû*) from Gilgal to Bethel has long puzzled interpreters. Some have assumed the passage must refer to a Gilgal in the central hills.[1] Others, recognizing the larger passage's connections with the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3–5, accordingly understand this to be the Gilgal in the Jordan Valley and are left simply to ignore the directional difficulty.[2]

An earlier form of this study was presented in the program unit Israelite Prophetic Literature at the SBL annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in November 2005. I wish to thank those who offered helpful feedback at that meeting, and I especially wish to thank Jesse C. Long and Anson F. Rainey for reading earlier drafts of the article and for offering excellent suggestions that have improved it and saved me from many errors. The conclusions presented here and any further errors remain my own. Both the article and earlier paper were completed with the support of a Baylor University Research Leave.

[1] E.g., John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (2 vols.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 423–24 (although Gray suggests that the prophets who appear at Jericho in v. 5 are from the nearby Gilgal in the Jordan Valley [pp. 424–25]); Wade R. Kotter, "Gilgal," *ABD* 2:1023; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 31; Choon-Leong Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *NIB* 3:1–295, here 176 n. 82; Jesse C. Long, *1 & 2 Kings* (College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 287 (though in n. 2 he leaves open the possibility of Gilgal in the Jordan Valley).

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Gilgal: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Israels," *VT* 1 (1951): 181–99, esp. 182; K. Galling, "Der Ehrenname Elisas und die Entrückung Elias," *ZTK* 53 (1956): 129–48, here 139; T. R. Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose," *Sciences religieuses/Studies in Religion* 13 (1984): 327–34, here 330 n. 25; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco: Word, 1985),

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While it might be tempting to write off the directional oddity as being the result of an editorial or traditional "rough seam," the passage's extensive interest in geography as signaled by its attention to a number of specific locations—Gilgal (2 Kgs 2:1), Bethel (vv. 2–3, 23), Jericho (vv. 4–5, 15, 18), the Jordan River (vv. 6–8, 13), Carmel (v. 25), and Samaria (v. 25)—suggests anything but a random loose end. The enumeration of these points on Elijah and Elisha's itinerary indicates, at the very least, a decisive concern for geography in this passage.

Not only do the place-names mentioned in this text correspond to known historical geography, but they also all play significant roles elsewhere in the passage's larger literary context of Deuteronomy–2 Kings.[3] The theological geography of these books—known collectively in scholarship as the Deuteronomistic History (henceforth, DH)—reserves a special place of scorn for Bethel, which stands in opposition to Jerusalem's unique status upon its founding as the one "place where Yahweh will cause his name to dwell" (Deut 12:5–7, 11–14; 1 Kgs 8:1–66; 12:26–33; 13:1–3; 2 Kgs 17:21–22; 23:15–20).[4] The reference to Bethel in 2 Kings 2 thus

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19–20.; Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 141–45; Robert B. Coote, "The Book of Joshua: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *NIB* (1998), 2:553–719, here 606.

[3] For Gilgal, see 1 Sam 7:16; 10:8; 11:15; 13:9–14; 15:2; 2 Sam 19:15, 40; and for Carmel, 1 Kings 18. Other instances of these books' interest in Gilgal, Carmel, Bethel, Jericho, the Jordan River, and Samaria are discussed below.

[4] The hypothesis that Deuteronomy–2 Kings emerged as a unified editorial and compositional work of the exile originated with Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981; German orig., Halle: Niemeyer, 1943). Major developments of the hypothesis were advanced by Frank Moore Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 274–89), who argued that the principal edition of the DH was composed during the time of Josiah and was then completed during the exile, and by Rudolph Smend ("The Law and the Nations: A Contribution to Deuteronomistic Tradition History," trans. P. T. Daniels, in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* [ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 8; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 95–110; German orig., 1971), who posited more than one exilic stage of editing. A number of subsequent variations on the hypothesis follow either Cross or Smend in positing successive editions, with at least one occurring each during preexilic and exilic periods (see William Schniedewind, "The Problem with Kings: Recent Study of the Deuteronomistic History," *RelSRev* 22, no. 1 [January 1996]: 22–27). In a recent attempt to reconcile the approaches of Cross and Smend, Thomas Römer posits successive editions in the Neo-Babylonian, exilic, and Persian periods (*The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* [New York: T&T Clark, 2005; repr., 2007]). In a more recent case for the DH as a largely unified work mainly from the late seventh century B.C.E., Jeffrey C. Geoghegan shows that editorial tendencies of language, style, viewpoint, and purpose cut across the distinct literary units from which Römer and others would see the DH emerging in different stages (*The Time, Place, and Purpose of the Deuteronomistic History: The Evidence of "Until This Day"* [BJS 347; Providence, RI: Brown

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invites consideration of any allusive dimensions of this text and the possibility that here as elsewhere in the DH geographic and theological interests are joined.

These relevant literary and theological factors call for a reexamination of this apparent dilemma of historical and biblical geography. In view of the strong aversion to Bethel in the larger context of this passage in the DH, one might consider whether the reference to "going down" to Bethel might be understood not as topographically correct but as theological and polemical in nature.

As the following discussion will show, a complexity of narrative features in 2 Kings 2 works primarily to validate Elisha as Elijah's successor but also serves the DH's anti-Bethel polemic. Accordingly, the reference to "going down to Bethel" in 2 Kgs 2:2 is theological in nature. The recognition of the literary pattern operative in 2 Kings 2 not only clarifies this ostensible topographical oddity but also resolves other difficulties of interpretation in this passage, such as Elisha's cursing of the "little boys" (vv. 23–24).

I. The Failed Search: Lexical and Geographic Solutions

The need for a Gilgal of higher elevation would be obviated by either of two proposed lexical solutions by G. R. Driver, each based on supposed alternative meanings for עלה ("go up") and ירד ("go down"). The first was that these verbs sometimes occur in Biblical Hebrew with the opposite of their expected meanings, a view that is not actually borne out by the passages Driver invokes.[5] Alternatively, Driver suggested that the two verbs had the specialized meaning "to go north" and "to go south," respectively.[6] The problem with this suggestion is that the use of these verbs in describing travel between Egypt and Palestine or places in between is based

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Judaic Studies, 2006]). Nonetheless, even the contention of an overarching cohesive viewpoint resulting from the work's late monarchic origins, as advocated in the present article, must contend with the evidence of subsequent editing and late additions. See Gary N. Knoppers, "Is There a Future for the Deuteronomistic History?" in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Thomas Römer; BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 119–34; Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24-141; Richard Nelson, "The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History: The Case Is Still Compelling," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 319–37.

[5] G. R. Driver, "On עלה 'Went Up Country' and ירד 'Went Down Country,'" *ZAW* 69 (1957): 74–77, here 74–76; idem, "Mistranslations," *PEQ* 79 (1947): 123–26.

[6] Driver, "On עלה 'Went Up Country,'" 76–77. Driver was followed in this position by W. Leslau ("An Ethiopian Parallel to Hebrew עלה 'Went Up Country' and ירד 'Went Down Country,'" *ZAW* 74 [1962]: 322–23) and S. Shibayana ("Notes on ירד and עלה," *JBR* 34 [1966]: 358–62).

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on the topography and elevation in question and thus involves the basic and expected meanings of the verbs.[7]

Thus, the search for a Gilgal from which one might "go down" to Bethel has led scholars to look to the central hills (see n. 1 above). The most promising candidate from historical geography would be *Jiljulieh,* some twelve kilometers north of Bethel, a suggestion made early on by Otto Thenius and George Adam Smith and invoked by many others since.[8] Unfortunately, this site still lies at an appreciably lower elevation than Bethel (*Beitīn*),[9] leaving the textual difficulty unresolved.[10]

[7] See G. Wehmeier, "עלה *ʿlh* go up," *TLOT* 2:883–96.

[8] Thenius, *Die Bücher der Könige* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1873), 270–71; Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (25th ed.; New York/London: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 318 (orig., 1894; repr., New York: Harper, 1966); Johannes Döller, *Geographische und ethnographische Studien zum III. und IV. Buche der Könige* (Theologische Studien der Leo-Gesellschaft 9; Vienna: Mayer, 1904), 242–43; Carl Friedrich Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament,* vol. 3, *I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (trans. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1900–), 290; F. -M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* (3rd ed.; 2 vols.; EBib; Paris: Librarie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1967), 2:337; James Muilenburg, "Gilgal," *IDB* 2:398–99, here 398. For the location of Jiljulieh, see Siegfried Mittmann and Götz Schmitt, eds., *Tübinger Bibelatlas* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), B X 12: 1712.1598.

[9] A fact duly noted in the secondary literature, beginning with Döller, who reports an elevation of 774 m. for Jiljulieh as compared with 881 m. for Bethel (Beitīn) (*Geographische und ethnographische Studien,* 243; see also Driver, "Mistranslations," 124; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* [1927; repr. ed. edited by Henry Snyder Gehman; ICC; New York: Scribner, 1951], 353). Nonetheless, Döller defended the identification of Jiljulieh as the Gilgal in 2 Kgs 2:1 and explained the description of "going down to Bethel" as being due to the need to pass through a valley in traveling between the two sites. While this consideration seems reasonable at first, it is consistent neither with the typical usage of ירד in connection with named destinations nor with the usual directional language for Bethel (both reviewed below).

For confirmation of Bethel's identification with Beitīn and problems with David Livingstone's identification of Bethel with *el-Bīre* and with other less convincing alternatives, see the recent review of the question by Klaus Koenen, *Bethel: Geschichte, Kult und Theologie* (OBO 192; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 3–12; and, more recently and with additional arguments, Anson F. Rainey and Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (with contributions by J. Uzziel, I. Shai, and B. Schultz; Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 116–18; Anson F. Rainey, "Looking for Bethel: An Exercise in Historical Geography," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 269–73. For more recent confirmation of elevations noted above, see Mittmann and Schmitt, *Tübinger Bibelatlas,* B IV 5.

[10] In addition to Gilgal near Jericho, Eusebius's *Onomasticon* mentions "another Galgal very near Baithel," though without connecting it to any biblical references (Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomasticon: Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.* [trans. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville; ed. Joan E. Taylor; indexed by Rupert L. Chapman; Jerusalem: Carta, 2003], 41; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon: The Place Names of Divine Scripture, Including the Latin Edition of Jerome* [trans. and

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Also problematic is James A. Montgomery's suggestion that "going down" reflects the geographical vantage point of the writer.[11] This would require the latter to be a location of higher elevation than Bethel, an unlikely suggestion in view of the fact that the site identified with Bethel (Beitīn) sits higher than almost any other population center of ancient Israel, including Jerusalem.[12] The failure of these lexical and geographic solutions draws attention to a neglected point in the history of this discussion.

II. Physical and Sacred Geography: "Going Up" to Bethel

Owing if nothing else to Bethel's prominent elevation, the mention of "going down" to Bethel is odd in the first place, occurring only in this instance. In connection with topography, ירד typically describes journeys to destinations in low-lying areas—valleys (Judg 1:34; 5:13–15; 1 Sam 17:28) and plains (Neh 6:2–3; Isa 63:14; Joel 4:2)—and to specific cities of lower elevation: Ashkelon (Judg 14:19), Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:21), Gath (1 Chr 7:21; Amos 6:2), Gilgal (1 Sam 10:8; 13:12; 15:12), Joppa (Jonah 1:3), Jezreel (1 Kgs 18:44; 21:16, 18; 2 Kgs 8:29), and Timnah (Judg 14:1, 5, 7, 10).[13] Like Jerusalem, Bethel—which is second only to Jerusalem as the most frequently mentioned Israelite toponym in the Hebrew Bible[14]—figures prominently as a sanctuary site in the central hills to which worshipers and other

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with topographical commentary by R. Steven Notley and Ze'ev Safrai; Jewish and Christian Perspectives 9; Boston: Brill, 2005], 65). On Galgal near Jericho, see Freeman-Grenville, Chapman, and Taylor, *Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.*, 33, 41, 50, 132, 181; Notley and Safrai, *Place Names of Divine Scripture*, 4, 48, 64–65, 82, 175. Though this other Galgal may be the same site as Thenius and Smith's Jiljulieh, Chapman describes it as "an unidentified site near Bethel" (p. 132).

The book of Joshua, in describing the distribution of the land, mentions two sites named Gilgal (besides the Gilgal near Jericho; Joshua 3–5) that are in the wrong location for our passage: a Gilgal on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin, which it also calls Geliloth (15:7; 18:17); a place mentioned in the list of conquered kings in the MT of ch. 12—a "King Goiim" or "King of Nations at Gilgal"—though the Septuagint reads "Galilee" instead (v. 23). As Muilenburg pointed out, the reference to Gilgal in Deut 11:30 is "difficult"; while it seems to indicate a location near Shechem, "the context would lead us to expect a reference to Gilgal near Jericho" (Muilenburg, "Gilgal," 399; see also Kotter, "Gilgal," 1023–24). In any case, these lesser-known Gilgals would all be different from the Gilgal in 2 Kings 2 (see Muilenburg, "Gilgal," 398–99; Kotter, "Gilgal," 1022–24).

[11] Montgomery, *Books of Kings*, 353.

[12] See Smith, *Historical Geography,* plate IV; Mittmann and Schmitt, *Tübinger Bibelatlas,* B IV 5.

[13] See, e.g., G. Mayer, "יָרַד *yāraḏ*," *TDOT* 6:315–22, here 318.

[14] Harold Brodsky, "Bethel (Place)," *ABD* 1:710–12, here 710.

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travelers are said to "go up" (Gen 35:1; Judg 20:18, 23; 1 Sam 10:3; Hos 4:15).[15] Thus, the mention of "going down" to Bethel from Gilgal or almost anywhere else calls for considering this directional language in relation to symbolic meaning at work in this passage and its broader literary context.

III. 2 Kings 2 and Prophetic Succession

Commentators on this passage have recognized various aspects of a collection of narrative elements centering on Elisha's status as Elijah's successor.[16] Those most apparent in making the case for Elisha's succession are (1) a distinct typology harking back to Moses and Joshua; (2) an extensive narrative symmetry; and (3) a polarity of "up-down" language throughout the passage. Those three central aspects of the narrative merit special attention in determining the significance of "going down to Bethel."

Moses and Joshua: A Model of Succession and a New Conquest of the Land

As interpreters have frequently noted, Elijah acts in imitation of Moses earlier in Kings, especially in the theophany at Horeb in 1 Kings 19.[17] Accordingly, the narrative of 2 Kings 2 models Elijah's succession by Elisha after Moses' succession

[15] Well known is the regular use of the verb עלה ("go up") to indicate travel or pilgrimage to a sanctuary site (e.g., Beersheba, Gen 26:23; Mizpah, Judg 21:5, 8; Shiloh, 1 Sam 1:3, 7, 21–22; 2:19; Carmel, 1 Kgs 18:42; Jerusalem, 1 Kgs 12:27–28; Ps 122:3–4; Jer 31:6; Zech 14:16–19). This usage doubtless relates to the usual location of ancient towns on tells or natural hills but also to the idea of the sanctuary as an earthly manifestation of the deity's supernal dwelling place. See, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:22–40 and the following language: "you shall go up [עלה] to the place that Yahweh your God will choose" (Deut 17:8); "(those) who did not go up to Yahweh at Mizpah" (Judg 21:5, 8). Accordingly, one "goes up" from the palace to the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12:11; 19:14; 20:5, 8; 23:2; Jer 26:10). See Wehmeier, "עלה *ʿlh* to go up," 885–86; H. F. Fuhs, "עָלָה *ʿālâ*," *TDOT* 11:76–95, here 89–90.

[16] See variously Galling, "Der Ehrenname Elisas," 129–48; Robert P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *VT* 19 (1969): 400–415; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 30–39; Dale Ralph Davis, "The Kingdom of God in Transition: Interpreting 2 Kings 2," *WJT* 46 (1984): 384–95; Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2," 327–34; idem, *2 Kings*, 19, 27–28; Jack R. Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," *JJS* 24 (1973): 41–42; Hartmut N. Rösel, "2 Kön 2,1–18 als Elija- oder Elischa-Geschichte?" *BN* 59 (1991): 33–36; Fred Woods, "Elisha and the Children: The Question of Accepting Prophetic Succession," *BYU Studies* 32 (1992): 47–58; Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 173–77.

[17] Carroll, "Elijah-Elisha Sagas," 408–14; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 452, 456–57; Davis, "Kingdom of God," 388–89; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 19, 27; Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 142–43, 175; Robert B. Coote, "Elijah," *NIDB* 2:242.

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by Joshua.[18] In keeping with this analogy are a number of specific narrative parallels that are widely recognized in existing scholarship on this passage.[19] Before his death and burial in Moab at an unknown gravesite, Moses lays hands on Joshua and conveys to him "the spirit of wisdom" (Deut 34:9). Similarly, Elisha inherits a "double share" of Elijah's "spirit" east of the Jordan, in the territory of Moab, at Elijah's departure (2 Kgs 2:9–15). In accordance with the narrative's model of succession, Elisha "plays Joshua to Elijah's Moses."[20]

The comparison with traditions of Moses and Joshua appears in other elements of 2 Kings 2, most clearly in the crossing and recrossing of the Jordan (vv. 8, 14). In the first instance, as Elijah and Elisha together cross from the west (v. 8), Elijah rolls up his mantle and strikes the waters of the Jordan, causing them to part in a manner reminiscent of Moses' crossing the sea (Exod 14:16, 21).[21] After Elijah's departure, Elisha duplicates this miracle, not only as a demonstration of his own power but also as a second crossing of waters, this time from east to west of the Jordan à la Joshua's crossing in the conquest (Joshua 3).[22]

After returning to the western side of the river, Elisha continues an itinerary that includes Jericho and Bethel, both being cities that receive notable mention in the conquest narratives (Jericho: Josh 2:1–24; 6:1–27; 8:2; 9:3; 10:1, 30; Bethel: 7:2; 8:9, 12, 17; in Judg 1:22–25, Bethel, like Jericho, is defeated after spies are sent into the city). This suggestion of a new Joshua leading a new conquest comports with the martial significance of Elisha's mission—the beginning and end of which are signaled by the slogan "the chariots of Israel and their horsemen" (2:12; 13:14) and which involves divine "chariots of fire" (2:11; 6:17), Elisha's instigation of palace coups through the anointing of generals (8:7–10:36), and Elisha's constant dealings with armies, soldiers, and war (2 Kings 3; 5; 6:8–7:20; 13:1–25), even after his own death (13:20–21)![23]

Gilgal is a location of singular importance to the conquest tradition, which is recalled in the book of Micah by the phrase, "from Shittim to Gilgal" (6:5).[24] As presented in the book of Joshua, Gilgal near Jericho figures significantly as the

[18] See, e.g., Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 191–94 ; Davis, "Kingdom of God," 388–89; Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 175–77.

[19] For the following specific details summarized in this and the following paragraphs, see variously the secondary sources cited in the previous three footnotes.

[20] Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 177.

[21] Ibid., 176. Joshua 4:22–23 explicitly likens the crossing of the Jordan in the conquest to the crossing of the sea in the exodus.

[22] In keeping with the Moses-Joshua typology, the notion of Elisha as a new Joshua leading a new conquest is discussed most extensively by Philip E. Satterthwaite, "The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2–8," *TynBul* 49 (1998): 1–28. See also Davis, "Kingdom of God," 389.

[23] See also Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 226; Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 176–77.

[24] See K. Galling, "Bethel und Gilgal," *ZDPV* 66 (1943): 140–55; Kraus, "Gilgal," 181–99; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 103–5; Coote, "Book of Joshua," 605–8.

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Israelites' main base camp in connection with the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 4:19–20) and the initial conquest of the land (9:6; 10:6–9, 15, 42–43),[25] events recalled in the crossing and recrossing of the Jordan in 2 Kings 2. The prophetic journey described there accordingly reverses the course of the initial conquest, back to the eastern side of the Jordan.

The base from which that journey begins for Elijah and Elisha is called Gilgal. The suggestion in this context of a Gilgal in the central hills—a Gilgal whose identification in historical geography has proved vexing (see above) and which otherwise bears little to no significance in biblical tradition—simply does not fit into the thoroughly referential nature of 2 Kings 2. Furthermore, the Gilgal near Jericho would match Elisha's persistent associations with the Jordan Valley—his hometown of Abel Meholah (1 Kings 19), the stories of Naaman's cure (2 Kgs 5:10, 14), the floating ax head (6:1–7), the "death in the pot" story (4:38–44), and the repeated mention of others "going down" (ירד) to visit Elisha (2 Kgs 3:12; 6:18, 33; 7:17; 13:14).[26]

The allusive nature of 2 Kings 2 suggests that the Gilgal in this text is the well-known Gilgal in the Jordan Valley, and what is intimated about Elisha's location in the rest of Kings is consistent with this notion. How, then, could Elijah and Elisha be said to "go down" from Gilgal to Bethel? Further insight into this question comes from the second aspect of the text related to prophetic succession.

Narrative Symmetry

Critical to Elisha's succession of his master in 2 Kings 2 is the fact that he witnesses Elijah's ascension, as anticipated in v. 1 and as narrated in vv. 10–12. A noticeable degree of symmetry in the structure of this narrative consists in events both leading up to and continuing from that scene. The concentric pattern of this narrative has been widely recognized in recent scholarship.[27] The central episode of Elijah's ascent (vv. 11–12) is framed immediately by the crossing and recrossing of the Jordan (vv. 6–8, 13–14). Leading up to the crossing is Elijah and Elisha's approach to the Jordan Valley, with stops at Bethel (vv. 2–3) and Jericho (vv. 4–5), an itinerary that Elisha reverses on the other side of Elijah's departure (vv. 18, 23).

[25] Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge*, 125.

[26] As Mayer sums up in connection with these passages, "Elisha resides in the Jordan depression near Gilgal" ("יָרַד *yāraḏ*," 318).

[27] Lundbom, "Elijah's Chariot Ride," 40–43; Davis, "Kingdom of God," 386–87; Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2," 332; idem, *2 Kings*, 19; Woods, "Elisha and the Children," 51–53; O'Brien, "Portrayal of Prophets in 2 Kings 2," 3–4; Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 10–17; Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 287–88.

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INTERNAL SYMMETRY IN 2 KINGS 2 AND LINKS WITH CHAPTER 1

Links Back to Chapter 1

Elijah		*Elisha*
Samaria (1:15)	←	Samaria (2:25b)
Elijah's "hill" (1:9–14)	←	Mt. Carmel (2:25a)
Two events of fire from heaven (1:10, 12)	←	Two she-bears (2:24)
"Come down!" (1:9, 11)	←	"Go up!" (2:23)
Elijah "goes down" to the king (1:15)		

Narrative Symmetry within Chapter 2

Gilgal (2:2)		
"Going down to Bethel" (2:2–3)		Elisha told to "Go up" at Bethel (2:23–24)
Jericho (2:4–5)		Jericho (2:15–22)
Crossing Jordan (2:6–8)		Recrossing Jordan (2:13–14)
	Elijah "goes up" (2:10–12)	

Continuing outward from there, the strictly symmetrical pattern appears to cease in ch. 2. In the first half of the narrative, the journey began for Elisha and Elijah at Gilgal (v. 2). When Elisha returns, after Bethel he continues on not to Gilgal but "to Mount Carmel, and then he returned to Samaria" (v. 25). This brief conclusion to ch. 2 serves as a segue to ch. 3, putting Elisha in place for what follows in Samaria.[28] At the same time, it corresponds to the overall movement in ch. 1 from Samaria (v. 2) to Elijah's hilltop perch called simply ההר (*hāhār*, "the mountain," v. 9), as Mount Carmel is called later in 4:27. In other words, these elements (i.e., mention of Carmel and Samaria), which are not integral to the central narrative symmetry of ch. 2, nonetheless link that chiastically structured part of the narrative with what is related about Elijah in ch. 1 (see the chart and the further discussion below).[29]

[28] Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 15.

[29] For a similar assessment of the links between ch. 1 and ch. 2 beyond the chiastic pattern in the latter, see Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 295 and n. 26.

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Between ch. 2's beginning at Gilgal and its concluding mention of both Carmel and Samaria stands an impressive structure of narrative and geographic symmetry centering on Elijah's ascension. This concentric pattern in the narrative demonstrates Elisha's correspondence to Elijah, the junior prophet walking in his master's footsteps.[30] In reverse direction, Elisha repeats Elijah's actions leading up to his heavenward departure, thus demonstrating in his resemblance to Elijah's actions and movement his role as Elijah's true successor. This mirrorlike effect is extended where the conclusion of ch. 2 shows Elisha's actions to correspond to Elijah's earlier in ch. 1, including his returning to "Carmel and then to Samaria" (v. 25; cf. 1:9, 15; other correspondences are discussed below). This recognition of reversed direction relates to the third narrative aspect confirming Elisha's succession, an "up-down" polarity of symbolic language.

Narrative Ups and Downs

In keeping with the symmetrical pattern of 2 Kings 2, the chapter's opening verse foreshadows Elijah's ascension as being of central importance to what follows.[31] Like the event's vivid description later in the narrative (vv. 10–12), its anticipation in v. 1 refers to Elijah's ascension with the verb עלה, "to go up." After this introduction, the beginning of the narrative itself includes the curious reference to Elijah and Elisha "going down" (ירד) to Bethel (v. 2). The passage's opening verses thus signal an "up-down" directional opposition.

The decisive moment of Elijah's heavenward ascent is described in spectacular details of storm chariotry and whirlwind (vv. 10–12). Around this vivid scene, the symmetrical pattern of 2 Kings 2 involves a topographical descent from Bethel, to Jericho, to the Jordan and across, and a corresponding geographic ascent on the way back. Accordingly, the focal point of this concentrically structured narrative presents Elijah's going up (עלה) from the topographical low point of the narrative,

[30] Davis, "Kingdom of God," 386–87; Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2," 333.

[31] See, e.g., Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2," 331; Seo·v, "First and Second Books of Kings," 175. Compare the comments of O'Brien, who argues against the focal point of the story being Elijah's departure with the suggestion that its anticipation in v. 1 represents "a technique in storytelling where a narrator lets the reader know more than a character in the story," thus robbing Elijah's ascent of any "suspense" that would mark it as central for the reader ("Portrayal of Prophets," 4–5). While O'Brien—correctly, in my view—argues against the necessity of regarding the anticipatory mention in v. 1a as a "later addition," his effort to minimize the importance of Elijah's heavenward assumption misses the point, which is not suspense but a new telling of what certainly would have already been a well-known story. Whatever new element or point is made is predicated on the still central episode of Elijah's departure. Similarly, Rösel finds it necessary to argue against the centrality of Elijah's ascent in vv. 10–12, seeking instead to argue for v. 15 as the "high point" of the narrative ("2 Kön 2,1–18 als Elija- oder Elischa-Geschichte?" 33–36). Again, an added nuance to an old story would in no way detract from the spectacular nature of Elijah's departure and hence its place as the focal point of the narrative.

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the valley of the Jordan—the apparent etymology of the river's name from the root ירד (הירדן, *hayyardēn,* "the one going down") contributing to the "up-down" polarity at work in the narrative.

What is more, the mention of Elijah's "going up" (עלה) in v. 1 and vv. 10–12 rings ironic later in ch. 2, when Elisha is told twice to "go up" (עלה) on the road to Bethel (discussed below). The latter instance both contrasts with Elijah and Elisha's "going down" (ירד) to Bethel in v. 2 and corresponds to earlier commands to Elijah to "come down" (ירד) in ch. 1 (discussed below). In sum, the language, action, and narrative structure of ch. 2 are built around a persistent "up-down" opposition.

The "down and up" pattern of ch. 2 provides an important basis for its linkage to ch. 1, in which this directional aspect is emphasized perhaps to an even greater degree and by other means. First, ch. 1 makes numerous repetitions of the related vocabulary—עלה occurring nine times (vv. 3, 4, 6 [2x], 7, 9, 11, 13, 16),[32] ירד eleven times (vv. 4, 6, 10 [2x], 11, 12 [2x], 14, 15 [2x], 16).[33] "Up-down" language prevails throughout ch. 1 from its beginning, which relates that King Ahaziah fell down from his upper chamber (בעליתו, from עלה, v. 2). At Yahweh's command, Elijah then "goes up" (עלה) to confront Ahaziah's messengers on their way from Samaria to inquire of Baal Zebub of Ekron (vv. 3–4). That the verb עלה in this case refers to the topography of Elijah's journey is possible, though the passage is vague as to Elijah's starting point (vv. 3–8). As in other places in Biblical Hebrew, עלה is used here with adversarial connotations.[34] That is, the verb is used in this instance with nuances beyond the literal meaning of "going up."

Similarly, Elijah's oracle to Ahaziah, which is stated (vv. 3–4) and then repeated twice (vv. 6, 16), employs "up-down" imagery with special nuance: "The bed you've gone up on [עלה] you shall not come down from [ירד], for you shall surely die!" Afterwards, Ahaziah sends an outfit of fifty troops with their commander who "go up" (עלה) to Elijah and deliver the king's demand that Elijah "come down!" (ירד, v. 9). In reply, Elijah sends down heavenly fire, destroying the messengers. The same thing happens once again (vv. 11–12) before Elijah is approached by a third group that, having learned the lessons of the first two, addresses Elijah with the respect due Yahweh's prophet. The angelic messenger of Yahweh directs Elijah to "go down" (ירד) with them, and he does so (again ירד) and then delivers to the king in person his "up-down" oracle of doom (vv. 15–17). The pervasive "up and down" opposition within 2 Kings 1 includes special nuances of context and meaning that ring especially ironic having been brought into connection with the imagery of Elijah's heavenward ascent in 2:10–12.

[32] Consistent with the narrative formula in vv. 9 and 13, the Lucianic recension of the LXX reads καὶ ἀνέβη in v. 11, indicating Hebrew ויעל (*wayyaʿal*) instead of ויען (*wayyaʿan*)in the MT.

[33] Along with the mention of "going down" (ירד) to Bethel and the name of the Jordan (הירדן) in ch. 2, the verb עלה occurs six times (vv. 1, 11, 23 [4x]).

[34] See Fuhs, "עָלָה *ʿālâ*," 84–85.

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This aspect of ch. 1 is among others that reinforce the case for Elisha's succession in ch. 2, including the designation of Elijah five times as "man of God" (vv. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), later a frequent appellative for Elisha (twenty-six times) but elsewhere used only twice for Elijah (1 Kgs 17:18, 24).[35] As commentators recognize, the showy miracle of Elijah's fiery destruction of "the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties" (v. 14 NRSV) corresponds in many ways to Elisha's destruction of the young boys in ch. 2.[36] While this point will receive further comment below, here it is worth noting the dual nature of destruction—two she-bears corresponding to two dispensations of heavenly fire in ch. 1. The demand uttered twice to Elijah, "Come down," corresponds inversely to the twice-stated demand that Elisha "Go up!"[37]

As in other respects noted above, ch. 2 confirms Elisha's succession of his master by showing his active correspondence to Elijah in mirrorlike fashion. That mirroring follows the concentric pattern identified in ch. 2 but also includes events reaching back into ch. 1. It also involves the "down-up" polarity that is central to the structure, language, and topographical progression of ch. 2 but that, as discussed, in other ways pervades ch. 1.

In the "downhill-uphill" pattern of ch. 2, Elisha's geographic ascent reverses a topographically downward journey to which Yahweh had directed Elijah and in which Elisha had insisted on coming along (vv. 2, 4, 6). Elijah's overall descent as described in the narrative is one that actually begins back in ch. 1, when he obeys the instruction of Yahweh's messenger to "go down" from the hill with the king's men to Samaria (1:15–16). The action picks up from there in ch. 2, where Elijah is described only as going downward on his route toward his ascension, including "going down" to Bethel after setting out from Gilgal (vv. 1–2). The mention of "going down to Bethel," though at odds with literal geography, fits the larger downhill-uphill pattern that prevails in this narrative.

To summarize at this point, the mention of "going down to Bethel" supports all three narrative dimensions demonstrating prophetic succession—Elisha as a new Joshua, symmetry of plot and place, and the down-up pattern. Nonetheless, the language of descent in connection with Bethel remains, as mentioned earlier, unusual in itself, with or without a misplaced Gilgal and an overarching literary pattern notwithstanding. While the reference to "going down" to Bethel fits within the larger directional pattern governing the narrative, the inconsistency of this detail both with literal geography and with typical language for Bethel requires further explanation. Accordingly, Jericho's place in this narrative merits closer consideration.

[35] Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 409–10.

[36] Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2," 331.

[37] Woods, "Elisha and the Children," 54, 57 n. 26.

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IV. Jericho in the Sacred Geography of the Deuteronomistic History

As the gateway to the land of Canaan, Jericho's paradigmatic importance in Joshua's conquest narrative is obvious and well noted.[38] Likewise, its place in 2 Kings 2 is integral to Elisha's role as the new Joshua.[39] In this new conquest of the prophetic age, Jericho is offered not destruction but blessing. Instead of *taking* lives, Elisha *preserves* lives in Jericho by curing (רפא) its spring (2:19–22). Note Elisha's pronouncement at this point in the narrative: "Thus says Yahweh, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor bereavement shall come from it" (v. 21). Elisha's blessing reverses the earlier curse pronounced on Jericho by Joshua:

> Cursed before Yahweh be anyone who tries
> To rebuild this city—this Jericho!
> At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundations,
> And at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates! (Josh 6:26)

Joshua's conquest eventuated in a pronouncement not only of curse but also of blessing (Josh 8:34).

In the new conquest by Elisha, the formerly cursed city of Jericho receives blessing and healing.[40] But with the power to bless also comes the power to curse. For the DH, these are matters that link the cities of Jericho and Bethel.

V. Bethel in the Sacred Geography of the Deuteronomistic History

In the conquest narrative of Joshua, Bethel is mentioned repeatedly in connection with Ai (7:2; 8:9, 12, 17). Like the fall of Jericho, Ai's defeat serves a paradigmatic role in Joshua, demonstrating the importance of obedience in the land.[41] Whether this association is an intentional foreshadowing of things to come for

[38] See, e.g., Coote, "Book of Joshua," 611–12.

[39] Satterthwaite, "Elisha Narratives," 8–11.

[40] In 1 Kgs 16:34, Jericho is rebuilt, and tragically so, by a man from Bethel (a certain Hiel [LXX: Ahiel]) in fulfillment of Joshua's curse. Though in keeping with the curse-fulfillment motif surrounding Bethel elsewhere in the DH (see esp. 1 Kgs 13:1–3 in connection with 2 Kgs 23:15–20, as discussed below), this part of 1 Kgs 16:34 is missing from the Lucianic recension of the Greek and thus appears to represent an addition to the DH. See Lea Mazor, "The Origin and Evolution of the Curse upon the Rebuilder of Jericho: A Contribution to the Textual Criticism to Biblical Historiography," *Text* 14 (1988): 1–26.

[41] Coote, "Book of Joshua," 625.

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Bethel is debatable.[42] What is clear is the unparalleled disdain eventually accorded Bethel in the broader literary context of 2 Kings 2 in the DH.

As related in the narrative of 1 Kings 13, soon after Jeroboam establishes Bethel as a royal sanctuary, this in violation of Deuteronomic worship centralization (Deut 12:5–7, 11–14; 1 Kgs 12:26–33), an unnamed "man of God"—again, a term used later for Elijah and even more frequently for Elisha (see above)—calls out against the altar at Bethel, predicting Josiah's defilement and destruction of the altar and sanctuary site to come three centuries later (1 Kgs 13:1–3; 2 Kgs 23:15–20). As is evident here and in other places, for the DH Bethel is uniquely emblematic of disobedience to Israel's God.[43] Bethel thus occupies a special place of scorn in the sacred geography of the DH. Given Bethel's role therein as an archetype of apostasy, one would expect some uneasiness with the city's mention in 2 Kings 2. On close inspection, that is exactly what the text shows.

First, in the visit to Bethel before crossing the Jordan, the narrative avoids the suggestion that the two prophets actually enter the city. The narrative is set in motion as Elijah tells his apprentice, "Yahweh has sent me *as far as* Bethel" (עד־בית־אל, v. 2).[44] This phrasing is consistent also with a starting point in the Jordan Valley, from which Elijah will in fact go as far as Bethel and then return toward the Jordan Valley, as opposed to continuing past Bethel from the central hills. Once Elijah and Elisha arrive there, the sons of the prophets at Bethel "come out" (יצא) of the city to meet them (v. 3).[45]

This way of framing things stands in contrast with the next segment of the journey, in which Elijah says, "Yahweh has sent me *to* Jericho" (יהוה שלחני יריחו), and v. 4 states explicitly "They entered Jericho" (ויבאו יריחו) and met with the sons of the prophets inside the city. Accordingly, on the return trip, Elisha enters Jericho, even lodges there three days but apparently does not even stop at Bethel (vv. 17–25). In contrast to Jericho, which has no sanctuary, Bethel, the place of the heretical sanctuary, remains a significant marker on the itinerary but not a town actually entered by Elijah and Elisha.

This avoidance of worship implications suggests a rationale for the odd reference to "going down" to Bethel. The narrative offers few details about Elijah and Elisha's activities among the "sons of the prophets" at Bethel and Jericho. The description of their approach to Bethel as "going down" not only fits into the larger "downhill" pattern of this segment of the passage but also, like the avoidance of

[42] See the discussion by Coote, "Book of Joshua," 626 and n. 64.

[43] See, e.g., Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 73, 198–99, 206–7; and, more recently, Mark Leuchter, "Jeroboam the Ephratite," *JBL* 125 (2006): 51–72, here 68–70.

[44] On the preposition עד, see Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 215.

[45] The MT curiously lacks the preposition ב as though in avoidance of locating the prophets "in" Bethel.

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saying they entered Bethel, avoids the possible worship connotations suggested by "going up" to a cult site (see above). Thus, the topographically incorrect detail of "going down to Bethel" may be not only an aspersion cast at Bethel but also part of the narrative's avoidance of any implication that Elijah and Elisha worshiped there.

No such danger accompanies the mention of Elisha's "going up" to Bethel on the return trip. First, it is clear that he never leaves the road to enter the city (2 Kgs 2:23–25). Second, the language of v. 23 is that "he went up from there [i.e., from Jericho] to Bethel" (ויעל משם בית־אל). Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is the phrase "to go up from there" (עלה משם) used in a context of worship.[46] Third, and even more significant, his fatal cursing of the נערים קטנים (literally, "little boys") who come out of the city to meet him on the road suggests anything but prophetic validation of this sanctuary site.

The significance of this grisly episode comes into focus with some attention to the expression נערים קטנים. The traditional interpretation that the males thus denoted are children derives from a literal translation of the phrase.[47] On the other hand, Gen 37:2 describes Joseph as a נער at the age of seventeen.[48] Solomon, at the beginning of his rule, calls himself a נער קטן (1 Kgs 3:7). Hadad the Edomite is a נער קטן when Yahweh raises him up as an adversary against Solomon and he escapes to Egypt, where he marries the pharaoh's sister-in-law (1 Kgs 11:14-17).

This language for young adult males derives from the social context of the "house of the father" (בית אב), the basic unit of ancient Israelite social organization.[49] Accordingly, the term נער is applied to an unmarried male who has not yet become the head of a household. Lawrence E. Stager provides a biblical example of this language, explaining, "David, the last-born of Jesse, was a *naʿar qātōn* (not the 'smallest' but the 'youngest' of Jesse's eight sons), when he fought Goliath (1 Sam 16:11; 17:31)."[50] As Stager explains, such younger sons within the household, having no prospects for inheritance, found status, wealth, and prestige in military, government, and priestly service.

The other term for this group harassing Elisha is ילדים (v. 24), which at first glance also would seem to indicate that these "lads" are children. On the other hand, ילדים is also used twice in 1 Kings 12 as the sole designation for Rehoboam's younger advisors, contemporaries who had grown up with him (vv. 8, 10). In the DH and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible these terms are used to designate young adult males, usually with royal associations. Accordingly, the group of males who

[46] I am indebted to Jesse C. Long for bringing this point to my attention.

[47] See, e.g., Eric Ziolkowski, *Evil Children in Religion, Literature, and Art* (Cross-Currents in Religion and Culture; New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[48] These references are pointed out by Woods, "Elisha and the Children," 48–50; and in a similar light by Davis, " Kingdom of God," 392–93.

[49] Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35.

[50] Ibid., 26.

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confront Elisha in 2 Kings 2, far from being little children, are young men of the royal and perhaps priestly establishment at Bethel.[51]

Against this group of young men, Elisha pronounces a fatal curse "in the name of Yahweh" (v. 24). The number of them killed, forty-two, is also the number of young men of Judean royalty and with connections to the house of Omri whom Jehu slaughters later in the narrative (10:14). Forty-two figures regularly in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East as a symbolic number of potential blessing or curse, confirming that the disaster was the result neither of a natural coincidence nor the prophet's own caprice but of divine intent.[52] Specific reasons for Yahweh's assault against the "young men" of Bethel are reflected in their words to Elisha.

In addressing the prophet, they call him "baldy" (קרח, *qērēaḥ*, v. 23). Among the various possibilities suggested for the name-calling's precise nuance is that it involves a contrast to the description of Elijah as hairy (1:8), a contrast that suggests a challenge to Elisha's authority.[53] In any case, the verb קלס ("to mock, spurn, make fun of") makes clear that the "young men" address the prophet with reproach.[54] This treatment stands in sharp contrast to Elisha's reception by the "sons of the prophets" (בני הנביאים) from Jericho who declare before the prophet, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha," and bow to the ground before him (2:15). Their recognition of Elisha as Yahweh's chief prophet is rewarded by the "healing" and blessing he then offers their city Jericho at the conclusion of his three-day stay there. Then, as a kind of foil to Jericho's בני הנביאים, the נערים קטנים of Bethel do not honor Elisha as Yahweh's prophet and accordingly reap destruction for themselves and their city (v. 24).

The doubled form of their adjuration—"Go up, baldy! Go up, baldy!" (עלה קרח עלה קרח, v. 23)—and the related dual agency of their destruction (two bears) corresponds to the twofold nature of the speech and divine punishment against other groups of young men with royal associations, namely, the two groups of fifty royal soldiers and their captains who gave Elijah the directive to "come down" (רדה, *rēdâ,* from ירד, 1:9, 11). Linking chs. 1 and 2, the doubled command to Elijah bears an inverse correspondence to the twofold demand that Elisha "go up." The latter also

[51] For a similar understanding of the term, see Woods, "Elisha and the Children," 48–50.

[52] See Joel S. Burnett, "Forty-Two Songs for Elohim: An Ancient Near Eastern Organizing Principle in the Shaping of the Elohistic Psalter," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 81–102; and idem, "A Plea for David and Zion: The Elohistic Psalter as a Psalm Collection for the Temple's Restoration," in *Diachronic and Synchronic—Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* (ed. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 488; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 95–113.

[53] Woods, "Elisha and the Children," 50–55; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 24; idem, "First and Second Books of Kings," 178; Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, 296–97.

[54] *HALOT,* 1105–6, s.v. קלס.

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involves an ironic mixture of correspondence and contrast to the fact that Elijah does "go up" in heavenward ascent earlier in ch. 2 (vv. 10-12).

As part of the reproachful speech of the "boys" of Bethel, the word to Elisha to "go up" plays as a mocking admonition against his legitimacy as Yahweh's prophet. Those who find themselves cursed by Yahweh are those who call for the prophet to "go up" to Bethel, language that elsewhere refers to worship at the sanctuary site (see above). The conquest that Elisha brings is aimed at the northern Israelite ruling house and its royal sanctuary at Bethel.[55]

In sum, those who suffer Elisha's curse and die in 2 Kings 2 are not children but a group of young adult males connected with the royal sanctuary of Bethel, who offer reproach rather than recognition of Elisha's mission as Yahweh's prophet and who call for the prophet to worship at Bethel. Like Jehu's purge, the cursing and slaying of the נערים קטנים are part of the conquest Elisha brings. Though Bethel itself still stands (as it will after Jehu), 2 Kings 2 shows that, unlike Jericho, Bethel remains a city and sanctuary under curse, doomed for destruction—destruction that will finally occur with the DH's second-greatest king, Josiah.

VI. Conclusion

The futile search for a highland Gilgal that fits topographically into 2 Kings 2 fails to account for the literary and theological dimensions of this passage. In view of those factors, the curious reference to "going down to Bethel" can be seen as part of a subtle yet significant anti-Bethel polemic in the passage, a symbolic detail fitting the broader "up-down" polarity on which this narrative is structured. Taking advantage of this pattern, the DH was able to bring prophetic authority and the symbolic power of the new conquest to bear on the certain demise in store for this hated sanctuary.

[55] Recall the reference in Amos 7:13 to Bethel as a "royal sanctuary and a temple of the kingdom" (מקדש־מלך . . . ובית ממלכה).

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